

November 1996

CIRC: 130

NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday, November 19, 1996

7:30 pm

Suite 103, 10612 - 124 St

(Parking is available at the back
or on the street)

A guest speaker will give a short
(15-20 min) presentation on a
topic of interest to everyone; our
regular support meeting will
follow.

Everyone welcome ! Coffee will
be served. For further
information please call Lynne
[redacted] or Ellen [redacted]



The newsletter welcomes your
questions, comments, letters to
the editor and any articles, such
as the two marvellous "coming
out" stories recently received.
Please bring them to a meeting
or mail them to:

Newsletter Editor
[redacted]

Thankyou!





**PFLAG SPEAKERS
BUREAU**

- October 4 - CBC (French)
interviewed Lynne, Ellen
and Fred about the purposes
and activities of PFLAG for
a news presentation on
October 11, National
Coming Out Day.
- October 21 - Five PFLAG
members, representing
parents of lesbian, gay and
transgender children spoke
to several members of

OUTreach, the
les/bi/gay/trans organization
on the University of Alberta
campus. Following their
presentation the students
asked a number of questions
and picked up various
PFLAG pamphlets and
literature, the favorite
being, *Advantages to Being
Homosexual*.

Thanks to Catherine, Joyce,
Bryson, Ernie and Irving.

- Oct 31 Hallowe'en -
Gaywire, which broadcasts
every Thursday night on
CJSR from 6:00 to 7:00 pm,
hosted PFLAG member
Ellen. She gave a short
history of PFLAG as both
an international and local
organization, then
elaborated on who we are,
why we are, what we do and
where we are. We welcome
all our listeners to the next
PFLAG meeting,
Nov. 19, '96.

PFLAG DISPLAY TABLES

- Oct 26 & 27/96 - PFLAG
hosted display tables at the
new Timms Center on the U
of A campus during Part I of
the Angels in America play.
The most "popular"

literature proved to be the following three:

-Homosexuality & Biology;

-The Dynamics of Sexual Orientation and Adolescent Suicide; and

-The Advantages of Being Homosexual.

PFLAG members had an opportunity to meet and talk with: a nurse who has taught sexual orientation to professionals for six years; several people with gay or lesbian family members; and a teacher in rural Alberta who plans to teach a unit on sexual orientation.

PFLAG SUPPORT

The Journey Isn't Solitary

This story by Mitzi Henderson comes to us from Melno Park, California, via the internet.

Coming out can be difficult enough for a gay, lesbian or bisexual individual. Less often acknowledged is the fact that parents, family and friends have to go through a coming-out process as well. And they often lack the level of support available for gay, lesbians and bisexuals. Mitzi and Tom Henderson's story is a textbook case.

The Hendersons, who just celebrated their 41st wedding anniversary, lived an upper middle-class life. They had four children in four and one half

years. After living in California, they moved to Minnesota. By this time, some of their children had gone away to college. During Christmas of 1978, their second son told them that he was gay. "Little lights of recognition went on in my head, as I remembered incidents from the past," she says. "Still, all I could think of was to ask him, 'Are you sure?'"

Henderson added, "We, as parents, went into the closet for five years. I had been a life-long Presbyterian, and I was active. The Presbyterian position is that homosexuality is not God's will for mankind. I had served on several boards within the church, and I had heard frightening things from people in the church. After three years, I got enough nerve to speak with my pastor about our situation. I was looking for some kind of education and support. His reply was, 'I don't know anything about that, and I would appreciate anything you could give me.' When asked if he would contact other pastors in the area and find out if there were any other parents of gays out there, the pastor said the topic was "too controversial."

Through the process, Henderson says she received the most help from her son. "He sent us literature, books and information. He talked to us and explained things." But, Henderson says, the isolation was hard. "We were worried, beyond the normal worries of parents whose children are away. We also worried if our

Edmonton

son was safe. Would someone hurt him? Would he be able to get a job? This was before AIDS was well known, so we didn't know enough to worry about safe sex. **We were all locked in by our fear.**"

In 1983, the Hendersons moved back to the Bay Area. One day, Mitzi picked up the phone and called a hotline. She told the woman at the other end that she was the mother of a gay son - and started to cry. When the woman asked her why she was crying, she said she didn't know and hung up. "It took me another year to try to make contact with someone," says Henderson.

When she did, she connected with the federation of PFLAG which existed at the time, and she began to meet with five or six other parents. The federation officially began in 1981 and had grown out of the 1979 March on Washington. The march included many family members and friends of gays and lesbians who connected with each other. For some, it was the first time they had met another person who was the parent, family member, or friend of a gay or lesbian person.

"PFLAG is 'coming out' as an organization," says Henderson, who is now the (American) national president of PFLAG. "We are becoming more aware of and involved with, issues in our local areas."

...When AIDS hit, it also hit PFLAG. "Many of our founding families lost members to AIDS," notes Henderson. The issues that grew around AIDS, combined with the issues of gays in the



military, seeded the argument of private versus public support for their sons and daughters.

"Sometimes I was accused of flaunting the fact that I had a gay son," remembers Henderson. The "visible levels of homophobic behavior and rhetoric" during debates on AIDS and the military issue, along with the virulence of the anti-gay right, galvanized families and helped turn the tide. PFLAG members decided that advocacy and educating the public had to become part of their mission.

...While their intent is serious, (PFLAG) methods aren't necessarily so. Local PFLAG affiliates marched in this year's Redwood City 4th of July parade, singing the Sesame Street song, "We are the neighbours in your neighbourhood" - to waves of applause.

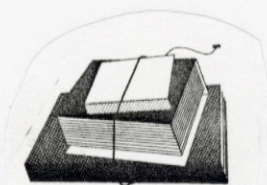
"Education is the key to changing people's attitudes," says Henderson. "Being gay is a fact. It is not an issue. It's not about sex. It's about differences - and you are the key." She tells lesbians and gays to help educate their parents, friends, and families. "Give them information. Give them resources. Let them know that there is support.

"We have to ask the parents to come out because, until they come out, they are in the closet. **Coming out is a gift. It is liberating and empowering to be who you are, no less so as the parent of a gay, lesbian, bisexual (or transgender).**

Henderson points out that, when her son came out and she first got involved, people were generally coming out between the ages of 25 and 27. Now young people of 14, 15 and 16 are coming out. These young people are still in high school, still developing and living at home. And often the parents are even more bewildered than Henderson was.

"I want to see every textbook have something positive to say about gays, lesbian and bisexuals," says Henderson. "I want it incorporated into the text, whether it's health, literature, science or history. Then it won't be possible to pick and choose to leave whole groups of kids out. It's woven right into the text."

The goals of PFLAG, according to Henderson, are about nothing less than transformation - both personal transformation and transformation of the world. "It's an ongoing process," she says.



PFLAG EDUCATION

The Movement to Break the Gender Barrier

by Michael Gilbert

(Courtesy The Globe & Mail,
July 27, 1996)

Edmonton

Unbeknownst to most ordinary citizens, a revolution, often but not always quiet, has been slowly gaining momentum within the Western world. The signs have been there for those who look for such things: talk shows, films, books, and television have increasingly been normalizing a previously marginalized population. Riding, to some extent, on the coat tails of the gay and lesbian rights movement, and placing themselves under the umbrella of queer culture, the group that author Leslie Feinberg calls "transgendered" or simply "trans" now wants to be heard from. The 'transgendered' citizens of the world who defy or deny traditional gender and/or sex categories by being men who live or dress as women, women who live or pass as men, or people who adopt whichever role suits their mood of the moment.

These "gender outlaws" are transvestites, transsexuals (transgenders), drag queens or kings, "butch" dykes, "femme" gays or hermaphrodites (having both female and male secondary sex characteristics) who are now demanding the right to live as they please without either physical or emotional harassment.

Transgender Warriors

Making History

from Joan of Arc to RuPaul

by Leslie Feinberg

Beacon Press, 212 pages

While transgender people have been with us for all time, and have been important subjects of literature and entertainment from Shakespeare to *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, they have, until recently, rarely been objects of serious study. In particular, the history of transgender people has been ignored, overlooked, or misrepresented. In her book, *Transgender Warriors*, Feinberg aims to reclaim the history of transgender activists and notables. Feinberg herself is a well-known and long-time activist. She grew up as an extreme tomboy suffering the slings and arrows reserved for those who do not fit neatly into society's bipolar gender system. As she grew older she first found a niche as a butch dyke in Buffalo's lesbian society, and then, in order to make a living and feel whole, moved to New York and began living as a man full time. Her 1993 novel, *Stone Butch Blues*, is a powerful and moving account of life as a transgender woman within Buffalo and Toronto's lesbian community in the late-sixties and early seventies.

This new book, like her novel and like so much of the writing coming out of the transgender community, is highly autobiographical. But where *Stone Butch Blues* was her account of the emotional and social trail that led her to where she is today, *Transgender Warriors*, is an intellectual rendering of that journey. Trans history is told to us via Feinberg's own recovery of that self-same history. It is the

unfolding of her realization that she is not alone in the world, is not the only person ever to have felt at odds with society's **genitally based** gender categorization, that provides the impetus for her explorations.

Every marginalized group that begins to claim its societal space turns, sooner or later, to the reclamation of a history that has been ignored or suppressed by the mainstream academic and educational institutions. The reasons for this are simple but profound. When a group's history is incorporated and respected within the mainstream, that group becomes visible and stands as a respected component of the historical fabric of a country or society. Young people encountering the stories can recognize themselves as a kind of person who has a right to be proud, to belong, to be a part of the historical matrix. Black, native Canadian, gay and lesbian young people see their groups as having traditions, personalities and history. Feinberg's motivation in writing *Transgender Warriors* is, in large part, to provide that kind of perspective for the transgender (people) and those connected to and interested in them.

That first major trigger for Feinberg, as for a multitude of others, was Christine Jorgensen's highly publicized sexual reassignment surgery in 1952. For most people the announcement was the occasion for ribald humour or

Edmonton

straightforward derision. But for many, albeit secretly and without sharing with anyone, there was a recognition, a snap-to-attention realization that others shared one's gender discomfort and were not always happy with their birth designated sex role.

Feinberg points out that this derision was not always so. **In numerous societies throughout the world, especially the ancient world, people who were transgender or bi-gender were often considered blessed, and frequently played an important role in the religious or spiritual life of the community.** This was especially true in native American tribes where two-spirited people (labeled 'berdache' by white explorers and chroniclers) were an institution in their own right. Only in relatively recent history with the forced intrusion of Judeo-Christian mores into native society have the two-spirited sometimes been shunned or excluded.

Christianity itself has had a very perplexing attitude toward its transgender constituents, especially women who come to live as men. The church stands squarely against any softness toward the transgender. And yet, the most famous transgender warrior in all history was Joan of Arc who, while first burnt at the stake, was eventually made a saint. Historically, her transvestitism is more often portrayed as an act of devotion rather than an essential component of self-expression. That she was put to death for



refusing to cease wearing men's clothing (by priests wearing soutanes and monks wearing robes) is often viewed as merely an excuse and not as an integral component of her calumnies....

Feinberg has given us an interesting book that offers much food for thought and a great deal of fascinating information. It is not, unfortunately, the great transgender history that is needed. That book still remains to be written. But it is a detailed account of the intellectual and emotional journey of one transgender warrior from fearful isolation to a place rich with pride and self-respect.



HUMAN RIGHTS

Klein, Reform Condemned for Rights "Backlash"

(Courtesy, The Edmonton Journal, Saturday, Oct 19, 1996)

The Reform party and Alberta's Tory government are spearheading a backlash against human rights in Canada, a national legal conference was told Friday.

"Make no mistake about it...what is at stake is the meaning and importance of equality in a liberal democracy," law professor Kathleen Mahoney warned about 150 judges and lawyers gathered in Halifax.

Mahoney, who teaches at the University of Calgary, said

right-wing political parties threaten to undermine the progress women and minorities have made since the Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force in 1982.

Those gains include sexual harassment laws, pay equity for women and affirmative-action programs...

"The official Reform doublespeak is to support formal equality as a concept but to decline to condemn discriminations," she claimed.

Mahoney said Alberta Premier Ralph Klein's government has spent thousands of dollars fighting gay and lesbian groups seeking equality through the courts, yet devotes only \$15,000 a year to human-rights education.

It has also instituted fines of up to \$5,000 for complainants if a government-appointed human-rights commissioner decides their cases have no merit.

Mahoney predicted courts will come under increasing pressure to adopt conservative ideas and back-track on human rights...

The conference was organized by the Canadian Institute for the Administration of Justice.

EVENTS CALENDAR

Edmonton Vocal Minority

REGARDS TO BROADWAY

Saturday, November 16, '96

8:00 pm

Edmonton

Convocation Hall

University of Alberta

Ah, BROADWAY....one of America's proudest traditions (at least until we got hold of it). Join Edmonton Vocal Minority as we take a riotous journey through Broadway - old and new. It's guaranteed to bring back a few memories and keep you laughing as we give our regards to Broadway.

Phone: [REDACTED]

ANGELS IN AMERICA

Part II: Perestroika

October 26 - November 17

Prior Walter is sick, alone and an unwilling prophet of a divine emanation. His friends and acquaintances are woven together and ripped apart as politics, AIDS, sexuality, family and the state of heaven all impose their conflicting wills on this feisty group. Grappling with concepts of love and loss in the face of overwhelming suffering, this is a radical rethinking of the American political drama - and playwright Kushner does it brilliantly with great pathos and considerable comedy.

Tickets: 425 - 1820

(Tickets are selling very fast!)

DANCE FOR LIFE

Sunday, December 1, '96

It's for everyone!

In recognition of World AIDS Day - A day of dance classes to raise money for HIV/AIDS

awareness, prevention, care and support.

If you have never danced before, this event gives you the opportunity to learn from professionals while supporting a great cause. Beginner and Intermediate classes will be offered in **jazz, ballet, tap, country, belly dancing, modern, ballroom and more!** Classes take place at Grant MacEwan Community College, Jasper Place Campus - our venue sponsor!

How to get involved...

Call the AIDS Network at 488-5742 to get your registration package. Raise at least \$40 per class in pledges and your class is free! Raise \$80 or more to become eligible for great prizes!

WEEKLY EVENTS

Gay Men's Wednesday Coffee Evenings

Breadstick Cafe

10159 - 82 Ave

from 7:30 on...

Phone Graham: [REDACTED]

Cross-Country Skiers

Sunday, November 3, '96

(weather permitting)

at 1:00 pm

in

Hawrelak Park

for beginners, novice and advanced skiers

Pink Triangle Youth of Edmonton

Saturdays, 8 to 10 pm

#103



Lesbian Life Line



OUTreach

A social and political organization on the University of Alberta campus. Meets 5:00 pm, Mondays at Athabasca Hall.

Phone: [REDACTED]

LABYRINTH LAKE LODGE

Hay Lakes, Alberta

403 - 878 - 3301

For personal and group retreats, 45 min SE of Edmonton, 160 acres of peace and seclusion.

Affordable, all season, fully equipped.

This gay and transgender positive lodge overlooks secluded Labyrinth Lake on 160+ acres of private land and water. Perfect for peaceful walks, skiing, canoeing, animal watching, campfires or group games, music and sports. Many other activities nearby. Sleeps 12 comfortably.

Edmonton

Morningside

Bed & Breakfast

"Your Home Away from Home"

with hosts Dick & Cindy Ryley

1645 Carrmi Ave

Penticton, BC

Phone: 604 - 492 - 5874

Late News Bulletin!

Friday, Nov 22 - 7751 & 85 St
Les/bi/gay/trans and gay positive church service at St. David's Anglican church at 7:30pm.



CHRISTMAS PARTY!

Friday, Dec 6, 1996

7:00pm

Jazzberrys

9965 - 82 Ave

Tickets \$10 - Available from PFLAG members or GLCC (4883234) until Dec 1, 1996. Les/bi/gay/trans and their parents, families and friends all welcome. (Bring a wrapped \$5 gift if you wish.)

REMINDER

There will be no business or support meetings in December; both helplines will be open:

It's a Transgender Life!

November 1996

SMALL STEPS TOWARDS BIG CHANGE

A MANIFESTO

I came out at work. It was my birthday present to myself. It was necessary for my self esteem. I was tired of hiding from my co-workers, and just about everybody else in my life knows Roxanne: all my straight friends, my family, my neighbours, and my research partners at the university. A rough count indicates I've told over 40 people in my straight life in the past year. It makes me feel good. I'm basically an honest person, I hate lying, especially to my friends. Telling people makes me feel true to myself. And I've had no problem with them, in fact many, including my parents, are strong supporters of me and the alternate lifestyle that I lead. So why not tell those people that I spend more time with than just about any other group? Well, I could lose my job. I am after all a senior research scientist with the government. I went to university for 14 years to get this position. There's a huge personal investment at risk here. Yea, right. But I'm also a political animal - I believe strongly that transgendered persons have equal human rights, and that it's a natural human condition. In my own little way I'm trying to change society's view of us. I'm out there, I'm out of the closet. I can be Roxanne whenever

I want, with whomever I want.
Except at work. And that's wrong.



Community Unity Candle

In fact it's hypocritical, and as I said, I hate lying. Gay activist theory currently tells us to come out and tell the world. Why would we do this? Well, these people have known me for eight years, they like me (I think), they think I'm a good person, they respect what I do, and they think I'm straight (actually those of you who have seen Roxanne's boy self will correctly believe they had to be suspicious). So if I tell them I'm transgendered, why should anything else change except their knowledge that I'm not straight? If they liked and accepted me before I told them, why shouldn't they like

and accept me after? I'm still the same person I was just before I told them. It's all very logical. This is how we will change the world, both for gays and transgendered persons. We will tell one person at a time. They liked us before, they will still like us, but now they know we are transgendered or gay. "God, this guy has been my friend for years and he's a transvestite - but he's just a normal guy. Maybe I better rethink what I know about these people." That's the theory and the process, many small steps leading to big social change.

My Dad who's a Ph.D. in education (U of Oregon, 1967, a critical time), and an activist I might add (he's told many of his friends about Roxy and attended his first gay rally this summer), tells me he now believes people who are not doing this, who are not coming out, are slowing down the process of social change. Hiding in the dark will not bring about social change. In order for society to accept us they must first know us. But they won't know us unless we tell them who we are, let them see us, and let them talk to us. If we want to be accepted by society we must first let people know that we are a part of society - their society. We are human beings. Society is becoming more progressive - we should not be retrogressive. We must be willing to take some risks as individuals if we are to move forward as a transgendered nation.

Take a step. Tell a friend or lover - help make the change.

"Never doubt that a small group of dedicated individuals can change the world...indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." -Margaret Mead

MY STEP: WHAT I DID

I passed by my supervisors door last Friday. He looked up at me and said, "Anything new in the world of botany?"

"Not really," I replied.

"Anything new in your own research?" he asked.

"Not at the moment," I parried.

"Anything new in the life of Ross H.?"

"As a matter of fact there is," I replied. "Do you want to know?"

"I'm interested," said he..

"Hang on, let me get some pictures."

And so it began, my formal coming out to my boss. Oh, but this was not a spontaneous moment. I had been working on it for some time - a year. It was probably my most critical coming out except for the first one. Given the current paucity of human rights, it seemed to be high risk. But on the other hand, I had been dropping clues: long, shiny, gelled and manicured nails, pierced ear rings, and plucked eyebrows. And then there was the time I took my supervisor to a gay art gallery, the day of the Vriend decision, because he was complaining of the lack of interesting exhibits in Alberta. So people had some idea that I was, at least, different.

I asked him if he had noticed anything about me. To which he replied that he would have to be blind not to notice the physical

changes! How long I asked. Almost exactly one year he answered. OK, so this guy's perceptive. Anyone else been asking about me? Everyone's been asking about you but I told them it was none of our business, that you were doing your job and that you'd tell us if and when you were ready. So after the initial rundown that this was a personal thing and that I had no protection under the human rights legislation for what I was about to tell him, I launched into an explanation of transgendered theory. He listened carefully, asked the questions any well trained biologist would and then said it made sense to him,, he had no problem with it. My sexuality and gender were my business and as long as it didn't hinder my work that was fine with him. In fact, he noted, that I had just had my best year ever and he could not help but think it was because I had finally come to accept Roxanne. He also said if anyone hassled me he would defend me on that point.

We then had a long talk about what it meant to be happy with our jobs and how important our personal lives had become to survival in the workplace. This lead to the ultimate question: he asked if I would ever consider coming to work as Roxanne? I was just speechless, my jaw hit the floor. It took a moment to recover, my dream goal was being laid on the table. Well, I said, it certainly would be important to me and in fact I already did much of my writing at home as Roxanne because I feel different as Roxy. I view the world in a different way and as a research scientist I could almost see the wheels turning in his brain....hmmm, two for the price of one and all with one person - a manager's dream! I told him I would do nothing to embarrass him, such as just

It's a Transgender Life!

showing up as Roxanne someday, but yes it would be a consideration. Then he said, "well you just tell people as you see fit and if you want to pursue it further we'll talk, but it makes sense to me." Then I suggested maybe it would be best if Roxy showed up at one of our social functions first where she could just blend in with the crowd. "That might be a good idea," he suggested. It was only then that I showed him my pictures. His eyes widened dramatically! He just couldn't believe the transformation. "Roxanne," he said, "I wished more women dressed and looked like this (hey, he's a sexist but I'll take my compliments where I can!) I laughed but I was thinking, "no dear, I wish more of the guys would dress and look like this!"

Anyway, now I'm out at work, but not out of work. What a relief! I've started my assault on my last major barrier, as I currently see it, to full social acceptance. I no longer fear losing my job when, and if, some adversary tries to out me. Having my supervisor on my side just makes me feel great. Hey, he knows and he accepts it. Hell, I dare say I think he's even a bit fascinated by it.

Yes, I am lucky, but I am not *just* lucky. Remember it took a lot more than the luck of having an educated and liberal supervisor for this to happen. I thought about this for a long time I practiced on some 40 other people. And when the moment was right I had the courage to take the risk, to take a chance in order to effect a positive change in my life. It was one of the many small steps that we all must take; each step fulfilling in some way society's eventual acceptance of transgendered persons. **Please, take a step.**